1998 CROP HIGHLIGHTS

The 1998 crop season got off to an early start with corn planting in April but rainy conditions set in by May 1 halting field activities. Rain continued until mid-month when warmer and drier weather arrived and farmers were able to continue planting crops and setting tobacco. Growing conditions were generally good through mid-August when dry weather set in. Dry conditions persisted through late September when rains finally returned. Crop yields, especially late planted corn and soybeans, were hurt by the dry late summer.

BURLEY TOBACCO

Kentucky farmers produced 416.0 million pounds of burley tobacco, down 12 percent from the large 1997 crop. The smaller 1998 crop resulted from both reduced harvested acreage and yield per acre. Harvested acreage declined due to reductions in the basic quota. The quota regulates the pounds of tobacco that a farmer can sell. Harvested acreage at 215,000 acres was down 25,000 acres from 1997. Yield at 1,935 pounds per acre was down 25 pounds. Barren County was the largest producing county in the State for the third year in a row with 13.7 million pounds.

Farmers seeded their float and conventional seed beds during March and April. About 69 percent of the tobacco plants for setting came from floatbeds and greenhouses while 31 percent came from conventional soil beds. Tobacco setting started the first week of May but wet soils halted progress until mid-May. An adequate supply of plants for setting were available. Plants grew rapidly becoming too large early in the season and had to be mowed off several times before setting. Tobacco setting was virtually complete by the first week of July. Some resetting was necessitated by previous wet field conditions. Disease problems such as blue mold, pythium rot and black shank were present as well as flea beatles and aphids. During July adequate rainfall helped the crop grow, but increased moisture also helped to spread blue mold. Black shank continued to be a threat in many growing areas cutting potential yield. Tobacco development was ahead of 1997. As of July 26, 41 percent of the crop was blooming and approximately 19 percent of the crop had been topped. A few very early fields began to be cut. Both blue mold and black shank problems were widespread, cutting yields, but the severity of the problems varied widely across the State.

During August generally drier field conditions helped to hold blue mold problems to a minimum. By August 30, 42 percent of the burley crop was cut, ahead of both 1997 and the average. Finding adequate labor to cut and house burley concerned many farmers. Rain was needed in September to help later set tobacco being stressed by heat and to help the cut tobacco in the barns come into case.

Rain was received starting in late September. However, by the last week of September, 91 percent of the burley crop was cut compared to 67 percent in 1997 and 84 percent on average. Tobacco stripping got underway. Tobacco cutting was virtually complete by mid-October. As of November 15, 41 percent of the burley had been stripped compared to 28 percent in 1997 and 38 percent for average. The key to a good 1998 burley crop was having it planted early in the growing season. Later set tobacco had a lower yield. A good supply of tobacco was available when burley markets opened on November 23. Growers were encouraged to sort their tobacco into several grades as it was stripped to ensure a higher price. Combined grades sold for lower prices at the auction.

DARK TOBACCOS

Production of the two dark fire-cured tobacco types grown in Kentucky were down from 1997 while production of the two dark air-cured types were up.

Type 22, Eastern Dark Fire-cured production with 8.91 million pounds was down 7 percent from 1997 and the smallest crop in 5 years.

Type 23, Western Dark Fire-cured production with 10.1 million pounds was down 6 percent from 1997 and the smallest crop in 3 years.

Type 35, One Sucker Dark Air-cured production with 5.59 million pounds was up 19 percent from 1997 and the largest crop in 4 years.

Type 36, Green River Dark Air-cured production was up 18 percent from 1997 with 3.01 million pounds. This was the largest crop in 4 years.

CORN

Corn for grain production was estimated at 135.7 million bushels, an increase of 15 percent from the 1997 crop. Yield per acre, at 115 bushels, was 12 bushels greater than the 1997 crop. Yields were up from 1997 but were hurt by a hot dry summer. Harvested acreage estimated at 1.18 million acres was up 30,000 acres from a year earlier. Union County remained the top producing corn county with 10.5 million bushels.

Corn planting got off to a good start in early April but then was slowed by rain. Emergence was slowed by cool, moist soil conditions and the emerged corn was yellowish in color. Corn planting resumed again in mid-May with the advent of dry, warm, sunny days. Some early planted corn was irregular due to earlier wet, cold field conditions and had to be replanted. By June 1, corn planting was 87 percent complete compared with 90 percent in 1997 and 89 percent for the five year average. Some river bottoms and low lands continued to be flooded and were not replanted. Even with the delayed planting of corn during the spring, development soon caught up and surpassed that of past years. As of July 19th, about 62 percent of the crop was silked or silking, ahead of 1997 and average. Disease and insect problems were limited. In early August, corn was developing well and farmers expected good yields. On August 9, 96 percent of the corn acreage was silking or silked, 73 percent was in the milk stage or beyond and 41 percent reached the dough stage. Many farmers were concerned about price levels and hoped excellent yields would help offset the effect of lower prices. During August, early planted corn developed well with a good yield potential while later planted corn needed rain for kernel development.

By late August, farmers in Western counties of the State began harvesting their corn. Many farmers allowed their corn to dry as much as possible in the field to avoid costly drying expenses. Farmers had harvested 28 percent of their acreage for grain by September 13. This was ahead of 1997, with 9 percent and 12 percent for the average. Early corn yields were good but variable while later corn yields were generally poorer. By October 4, 98 percent of the crop was mature, ahead of 1997 and the average. Harvest was 69 percent complete by this time. Quality of the corn was fair to good with yields hurt by the hot, dry summer. The corn harvest was virtually complete by the first week of November.

SOYBEANS

Farmers produced an estimated 36.0 million bushels of soybeans, down 14 percent from 1997. The smaller crop resulted from both decreases in acreage and yield. Yield per acre was estimated at 30.0 bushels per acre, down 4.5 bushels from 1977 and the lowest in 10 years. Harvested acreage at 1.20 million acres was down 20,000 acres from 1997. Daviess County continued as the leading soybean producing county with 2.64 million bushels.

Planting of single crop soybeans began in mid-May in the western parts of the State after being delayed by wet soil conditions. As of May 31, 36 percent of the soybean acreage had been planted, ahead of 1997 and the average. Farmers like to get corn planted and tobacco set prior to turning to soybean planting. However, they were still setting tobacco while planting soybeans. Planting of single crop soybeans continued through June. Planting of double crop soybeans following the small grain (winter wheat and barley) harvest started the first week of July. Planting continued through the third week of July with farmers expecting the year's crop to be generally good due to ample moisture.

Adequate moisture during most of August enabled good plant growth. As of August 16, 76 percent of the crop was blooming or beyond and 47 percent of the acreage was setting pods or beyond. Both were ahead of 1997 and the average. Soybeans looked good at this time. Late August however, turned dry when rain was needed for a good pod fill. Dry weather continued through late September. Then much needed rain was received but it came too late for many soybean farmers.

Harvesting of soybeans started in late September. By October 4, 22 percent of the State's acreage had been harvested. This compared to 10 percent in 1997 and 7 percent for the average. Rain during late September and October helped some second crop soybeans. Warm fall temperatures continued until late October enabling late planted beans to mature before the first frost of the season. Yields of soybeans were down, especially second crop soybeans. Beans also tended to be smaller in size.

OTHER CROPS

Kentucky farmers produced 24.8 million bushels of winter wheat. This was up 9 percent from 1997. Yield at 45 bushels per acre was down 9 bushels from 1997 and the smallest yield in 7 years. Logan County remained the leading wheat producing county with 2.64 million bushels.

The winter wheat crop came through the relatively mild winter with little damage. An arctic cold blast in early March, however, hurt the crop in areas with advanced development. Reports of damage ranged from complete loss to no damage. Some wheat froze to ground level but the plants came back by tillers. Resulting tiller development helped to repopulate the wheat crop. In May and June, several storms occurred that caused some lodging. Disease problems such as rust, head scab, leaf and glume blotch were present in some areas. Winter wheat harvest started in mid-June and was completed by mid-July.

Alfalfa hay production was estimated at 875,000 tons, up 17 percent from 1997. All other hay production at 4.83 million tons was up 24 percent from 1997. This was the largest production on record. Fleming County was the leading producer of alfalfa hay while Pulaski County was the leading producer of other hay.

Alfalfa and other hays came through the winter with only small freeze damage losses. First and second cuttings were exceptionally good with adquate moisture and good curing weather. Later cuttings were hurt by the dry late summer. Acreage cut for other hay was up 250,000 acres from a year earlier. Cutting for other hay tends to increase in dry years when farmers tend to harvest more hay acreage to help feed their livestock.